

OPENING STATEMENT  
REP. TOM PETRI  
A HEARING ON TRANSIT SAFETY:  
THE FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION'S  
STATE SAFETY OVERSIGHT PROGRAM  
Wednesday, July 19, 2006 – 2:00 pm

Good afternoon. This hearing will come to order.

Rail transit is a very safe mode of transportation. There were 3.25 billion passenger trips on heavy rail, light rail, and other rail in 2004, and a total of 82 fatalities. Of these deaths, 27 were suicides, which could not be foreseen or prevented by the transit agencies.

There are a number of reasons that riding transit is a very safe way to travel. In general, transit vehicles are much larger and more substantially built than personal cars and vans. Most rail cars run on separate rights-of-way, and rail crossings are usually protected by crossing gates.

Furthermore, transit vehicle operators are highly trained to drive defensively and anticipate potential safety problems. However, any number of preventable accidents is too many – transit providers must strive to make every trip safe and reliable.

Because the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is not a regulatory agency, it does not manage a top-down safety inspection and enforcement program like those of the Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, or Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Instead, FTA relies upon State Safety Oversight agencies that are designated by each State that has a fixed guideway rail system.

There are currently 42 rail transit systems under the State Safety Oversight program, in 26 different states. In the next 3 years, as many as 7 more rail transit systems may open, including systems in 2 more states.

We are holding this oversight hearing today to explore the effectiveness of the FTA State Safety Oversight program. We will talk about FTA's program goals and performance measures, the Government Accountability Office's findings in a year-long review of this program, and the actual day-to-day management of the state oversight agencies.

Even though transit is a very safe mode of travel, accidents do happen. Last Tuesday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, a Blue Line Chicago Transit Authority train derailed and caught fire in the tunnels below the Clark and Lake subway station. Thankfully, there were no fatalities, though two people remain in the hospital in critical condition. The Regional Transportation Authority, the State Safety Oversight agency for CTA, is appearing at today's hearing. We will listen with interest to a real-time discussion of how an oversight agency responds to accidents on the transit systems they oversee.

The State Safety Oversight program was first created in the 1991 ISTEA authorization bill, and is, overall, a very successful program. However, there may be room for improvement even in a good program, and we look forward to exploring those suggested improvements at this hearing. Thank you to all the witnesses who traveled to Washington, D.C. to present testimony at today's hearing.

Mr. DeFazio, do you have an opening statement?